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ABSTRACT

A survey of 210 professional communicators measured their sensitivity to the problem of readability, especially as it has been treated in the plain English movement (the drive to improve written materials and to make the unreadable readable). The results of the survey showed that 23% of the communicators rated the plain language concept "important," with 73% rating it "very important." Out of six possible readability activities offered in the survey, the average communicator had done only 1.1. Looking at the overall percentages, 75% had done two or fewer readability activities, and 40% had done none. A correlation was found between how effective communication programs were preceived to be and how much effort was spent trying to simplify written materials. Those communications programs rated as very effective averaged three readability activities, while those rated as ineffective averaged only one readability activity. Only 59% of the communicators surveyed realized the severity of the national reading problem and the negative effect it had on individuals and society. Only 48% knew what a readability test was. Only 29% kept a file on the subject, and 48% did not know if their organizations were affected by readability laws. Only 15% had formally evaluated their audiences' reading levels, and only 35% had formally evaluated the readability of their organizations' written materials. (RL)

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THE LANGUAGE SIMPLIFICATION MOVEMENT

Where Does It Stand?

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Jodee Sacco
The American University
Washington, D.C.
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CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Introduction

No matter what their message may be, the success of public relations specialists, marketing representatives, legislators, and lawyers ultimately depends on their ability to communicate. "WRITE FOR YOUR AUDIENCE"[1] is preached over and over again and still this basic principle is often forgotten or deliberately ignored.

Take the business community as an example. In "The Study of American Opinion," sponsored in 1978 by "U.S. News and World Report," general business communication efforts were rated "poor" by significantly more Americans than rated them "good."[2]

Comparing these 1978 ratings with a similar survey in 1976, all categories concerning the credibility of communication efforts in American business showed a marked decrease in public favor.[3] Even with today's sophisticated information programs, eye-stopping graphics, clever slogans, and electronic media machines, people are evidently understanding and believing less and less. Researchers as well as communicators are trying to find out why.[4]

Much of the problem lies in the area of education. According to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Americans are currently suffering from a serious shortage of basic educational skills. The statistics are alarming.[5]

Approximately 20% to 25% of the American adult population is considered "functionally illiterate." Although able to read to some extent, these people are unable to understand the basic written materials that play a major role in their everyday lives.

It gets worse. Although 20% to 25% of the American adult population is considered functionally illiterate, about 10% is merely functional, operating incompetently in areas where they are most familiar, such as their job.

Statistics on student reading levels are just as grim. Last year, the Association of American Publisher's "Guide to Reading Textbooks"--a guide intended for college freshman--had to be rewritten to a ninth grade level.[6]

More than 1/3 of the University of Wisconsin's junior year journalism majors did not meet the minimum admission standards in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and word usage. And at the University of North Carolina's Journalism School, 39% flunked the basic spelling test.[7]

The Education Commission of the States recently released data showing that average verbal and math college entrance exam scores hit another low in 1975. Many of the students tested had trouble reading standard forms such as traffic tickets, insurance policies, and book club applications.[8]

In the November, 1974, issue of the Harvard Educational Review, David Abel writes of a legal complaint drafted by an 18-year old, Peter Doe (pseudonym), that accused the San Francisco Unified School District of misrepresentation and

breach of constitutional and statutory duties owed to students and parents. Doe claimed he remained functionally illiterate after 13 years of regular attendance in the San Francisco public schools. He sued for damages in excess of $500,000.[9]

Like it or not, our future work force and consuming public is comprised of many Peter Does. What can be done to help these handicapped readers? Several things, none of which is easy. Our reading problem is very complex. It lies with learners, teachers, teaching techniques, classroom structures, dialect differences, and social conditioning.

We must face certain bitter facts. Trying to solve the problem academically will take decades. No matter how much we spend on national reading improvement programs such as "Back to Basics" and "The Right to Read," Peter Does will surely continue to exist.

Another stopgap way to help functional illiteracy is to improve written materials. In other words, make the unreadable--readable. We should be able to noticeably increase reading comprehension if we:

. write to the level of our audience--not over their heads;

. make information simpler to read and less intimidating;

. shorten sentences and paragraphs;

. use familiar words, relevant examples, and personal pronouns; and

. design our materials to be attractive and readable.

The advocation of this clear, readable writing style is nothing new. In the first century A.D., the Roman philosopher,

Seneca, was one of the first to write in support of short sentences. In 1817 Jefferson wrote a letter to a fellow lawyer, Joseph C. Cabell, on the evils of "lawyerish gobbly goop," making its elimination one of his crusades.[10] In the 1940's, the concept of readable writing was successfully popularized with the publication of The Art of Plain Talk by Dr. Rudolf Flesch. And during the last two decades the subject has won the attention of many researchers and specialists.

But the art of simplified writing is not only attracting the attention of theorists and academicians. It has captured the interest of government, non-profit associations, and private business as well.

In the early 1970's, companies such as Citibank of New York and The St. Paul Insurance Companies started simplifying their consumer forms and policies. Since then, many others have followed suit. In April of 1978, the New York "Plain Language" Sullivan Act was introduced, signaling a new era of government regulation of business and industry. Up until this time, the government had been concerned, more generally, with overall trade practices within a given industry. Today, plain language statutes are attempting to regulate and, in a sense, dictate the most basic relationship between consumer and supplier--the content of the written contract.[11] The Sullivan Act has spawned the introduction of similar legislation in at least 30 states.[12]

In 1977, trying to cut through "federalese" jargon and red tape, President Carter issued an Executive Order requiring

all federal agencies to write regulations in plain language. Also, Congress has passed a Truth in Lending Simplification and Reform Bill, S.B. 103, requiring that the Federal Reserve Board publish model "easy to read" forms and clauses for common transactions.[13]

The Problem

Although the plain English movement has gained much public attention, little has been done to measure how professional communicators have responded. One has to ask what is really being done to simplify our written materials? Are those most responsible for our information systems educating themselves about our national reading problem and its link with ineffective writing? Are they taking a good hard look at their organizations' written materials and evaluating them for readability? Or are they continuing to approve writing that comes from habit rather than thought? Have they noticed the national attention the readability issue has received and the spread of plain language legislation? Or are they dismissing these developments as another fly-by-night consumer issue?

Based on a survey of select professional communicators, this study will attempt to answer these questions. It will measure communicators' sensitivity to the problem of readability and will note what, if anything, they are doing about it.

The Subproblems

The four subproblems examined in this study are:

. to measure the awareness professional communicators have about our country's high rate of functional illiteracy;

. to determine if communicators are aware of the important role effective writing can play in helping the functionally illiterate;

. to see if communicators have developed activities encouraging clear, readable writing within their organizations, and if so, how successful they believe these activities to be; and

. to measure the effect plain English laws have had on communicators and their organizations.

The Hypotheses

The five hypotheses tested in this study are:

. communicators aware of our functional illiteracy problem realize the importance of language simplification more than communicators unaware of the problem;

. organizations directly affected by readability laws, and therefore consumer oriented, have done the most to simplify their information;

. communicators from organizations that have to comply with readability laws will know more about the language simplification issue than communicators from organizations that do not;

. more organizations do not have an established policy regarding the readability of their written materials than do; and

. more organizations have not committed funds to simplify their written materials than have.

The Assumptions

This research paper is written with the understanding that:

. clear readable writing is a communication tool of fundamental importance;

. a reader is almost sure to fail if faced with poorly written materials;

. ineffective writing is a major cause of functional illiteracy; and

. trying to impress rather than express, most people are locked into a verbose writing style.

The Delimitations

This study will not attempt to:

. prove the importance of reading comprehension;

. select population groups and measure their reading skills;

. make socio-economic determinations by comparing various reading and comprehension levels;

. discuss the complexities of grammatical construction or language form;

. teach "the art of readable writing";

. teach or evaluate readability testing methods; and

. examine language complexity in other countries.

The Definition of Terms

Communication. The word "communication" is derived from the Latin word "communis" meaning "common." Thus, the purpose of communication is to establish a commonness. Communication is the cement that holds our interdependent society together.

Readability. The term "readability" has no standard meaning. Webster's Unabridged Dictionary defines "readable" as "legible . . . easy to read, because interesting or pleasing . . ., that permits or admits of reading."

Readability is determined by three interrelated things--interest, legibility, and ease of understanding.

"In the broadest sense, readability is the sum total of all those elements within a given piece of printed material that affects the success a group of readers have with it. The success is the extent to which they understand it, read it at an optimum speed, and find it interesting."[14]

Readability Writing. The popular name given to the science of language simplification in the 1940's by Dr. Rudolf Flesch, it means the rewriting of written materials to make them more readable.

Dr. Rudolf Flesch. Father of modern day readability writing and author of several books on the subject.

Readability Tests. Methodology developed by various researchers during the past 50 years to measure the reading level of written materials. The idea underlying this measurement is the appropriate matching of reader and printed material.

Functional Illiteracy. An individual is considered to be "functionally illiterate" when he or she lacks the basic reading skills needed to deal successfully with everyday life.

Full Words. Words which have substance and meaning and transmit a whole thought.

Empty Words. Words that say nothing when they stand alone and are used to tie full words together--language tissue (e.g., besides, however, nevertheless).

Personal Words. All words of feminine or masculine gender (e.g., wife, father). All first, second, and third person pronouns except the neuter pronouns "it" and "their" when referring to things instead of people.

Legalese. The term used for verbose legal jargon found in most legal contracts and documents.

Federalese. The nickname for verbose and confusing jargon found in the writing of most government bureaucrats.

Gobbledygook. Thomas Jefferson made the issue of simplified writing one of his life-long crusades. He referred to the legal language of his day as "lawyerish gobbly goop."

FOOTNOTES

[1]Allen Weiss, Write What You Mean, AMACOM, N.Y., N.Y., 1977, p. 3. Edwin Newman. Strictly Speaking, McGraw Hill, N.Y., N.Y., 1978. George Gordon. The Language of Communication, Hastings House, 1967. George Klare, Know Your Reader, Hermitage House, 1954.

[2]"The Study of American Opinion," sponsored by the marketing department of "U.S. News and World Report," conducted by Marketing Concepts, Inc. This survey, conducted by mail, is based on 5,800 returns, making it the largest in the public domain. The following 1978 ratings are the ones referred to in this research paper:

American Business Communication Efforts With:

	Good	Average	Poor	No Opinion
Employees	11%	60%	21%	8%
Stockholders	27	55	7	11
Customers	14	60	17	9
General Public	13	58	22	7

[3]Ibid.

American Business Efforts Communicating With:

	1976 "Good"	1973 "Good"
Employees	31%	27%
Stockholders	15	14
Customers	14	13
General Public	12	11

[4]National Assessment of Educational Progress. "Reading in America: A Perspective on Two Assessments," Reading Report 06-R-01, 1974-5 Assessment. A project of the Education Commission of the States funded by the National Center For Education Statistics; Oct. 1976.

J. M. Feldstein, "Reading Ease and Human Interest Scores of Thirty-two Recent Child and Developmental Psychology Texts." Teaching of Psychology, vol. 4 (Feb. 1977) pp. 43-44.

R. Flesch, Marks of Readable Style: A Study in Adult Education, N.Y., N.Y. Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1943.

[5]"The Adult Functional Competency Study," conducted by H.E.W., The University of Texas, and The Business Training Bureau, 1975.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid.

[9]David Abel, "Can a Student Sue a School for Educational Malpractice?" Harvard Educational Review, Nov. 1974, Issue IV p. 416-436.

The California Appeals Court rejected the suit noting the difficulty of proving educational malpractice. Although Doe lost, the implications of the case are far-reaching. It raises the question regarding the responsibility an educational system has to its students.

[10]Letter from Thomas Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, September 9, 1817. The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Monticello, Charlottesville, Va.

[11]Patrick W. Semegan, "Plain Language Legislation," Quarterly Report, published for the Conference on Personal Finance Law, The American Bar Assoc., Spr. 1979, Vol. 33, No. 2.

[12]Ibid., p. 27.

[13]SB108, 96th Congress, 1st Session 5 (a); Senate Reports on SB108, 96th Cong., 1st Session, p. 11.

[14]Edgar Dale, and Jeanne S. Chall, "The Concept of Readability," Elementary English, XXVI Jan. 1949, p. 23.

CHAPTER TWO

THE REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

To understand why the concept of language simplification has gained so much attention--enough to actually be considered a national communications movement--this chapter will review what others are saying and doing about it. Issue by issue, the components of the movement will be discussed, citing opposing and supporting arguments.

The Written Word and its Historic Impact

As far as we know, man has always been able to communicate verbally. The written word, however, is much more recent--about 6,000 years old. And it was less than 3,000 years ago that speech and writing merged with the development of the alphabet. "Therefore," according to psychologist George Miller, "in terms of an evolutionary scale, writing the spoken word was invented only a few moments ago."[1]

Some scholars believe this historic invention signaled the birth of civilization, creating profound political and social changes. Miller discusses two of these--the birth of history, and the invention of logic. "In my opinion," he says, "the more significant of these two intellectual activities was logic, which directly affected how the mind worked."[2] Thus, with writing, one was now able to contemplate one's thoughts. In essence, writing made language self-conscious and gave its author a sense of responsibility.

What is Adequate Literacy?

Tracing the history of the written word brings us to the issue of literacy. At the International Reading Association's 20th Annual Convention, noted researcher, Dr. Jeanne S. Chall, pointed out that although the written word had been around for some 3,000 years, "mastery of it by a substantial portion of the population is probably happening just now--and for developed countries only."[3] She further states that, "today nearly half of the world cannot read or write, and certainly not on a level adequate to read a newspaper or magazine, write a letter, or read a technical pamphlet."[4]

As a population, however, our average literacy level has steadily risen. But for those at the lower end of the scale, this rise can only create a greater gap between their achievement and that of the average. "Thus," Dr. Chall believes, "literacy, similar to poverty, not only has an absolute but a relative value."[5] As the average reading level of society rises, those at the lowest levels may experience their lacks more keenly.

Dr. Chall believes this issue leads to several big questions: What is adequate literacy? At what level should, or could, we expect people to read? Should we simplify written communication to be read by all? Or should the major effort go into literacy training?

For answers, she recommends we turn to research, philosophy, religion, and moral values. Each nation must set

standards and answer these questions for itself. For the United States she submits we consider that "any adult is at a disadvantage when he or she cannot read a serious newspaper, a news magazine, a federal income tax form, and the bold and fine print on a house or apartment lease."[6]

Reading levels must be taken seriously. But what about the methodology used to calculate them?

Readability Testing and Methodology

As mentioned in Chapter One, the concept of readability became popular through the writings of Dr. Rudolf Flesch. His book, The Art of Plain Talk, published in 1946, originally was intended as an extension of his Ph.D. dissertation, Marks of Readable Style. With Flesch's statistical formula for measuring readability as its central feature, this book offers sound, practical guidelines for readable writing.

His second book, The Art of Readable Writing, published in 1949, is a complement to his first. It concentrates on revisions of his readability formula. In 1951 he wrote How to Test Readability stressing not only reading levels, but reading ease, human interest, and comprehension. And in 1964 he wrote The ABC of Style in which he literally offers a word diet to those verbally overweight.

Dr. Flesch is only one out of many researchers and academics to develop readability testing methods. Although not necessarily the best, the Flesch test continues to be the most popular and is a required evaluation method for many state readability laws.

Other popular methods are:

- The Gunning Fog Index;
- The Fry Graph;
- The Dale-Chall Formula; and
- The SMOG Count.

Because legislators have used the Flesch test and other methods to put teeth in their state plain language laws, these formulas have come under much recent scrutiny. Dr. Janice C. Redish, director of the federally-funded Document Design Project at the American Institutes for Research, addressed these shortcomings at the March 1979 Practising Law Institute's Drafting Documents in Plain Language Workshop.

According to Dr. Redish, the formulas do not measure readability per se. Actually, they "do no more than allow you to say that this text is similar in certain features"[7] to texts that children at a given grade level can read.

Most readability research has concentrated on school children, and although helpful, the tests do not take into account the fact that an adult with a 9th grade reading level may be able to cope with ideas and words unfamiliar to a child with a 9th grade reading level.

The debate goes further. A 1979 New York Times article entitled "A Rash of Plain English Bills," reported that "the business community often looks to readability formulas as a means of guidance and a convenient source of reassurance that materials have indeed been simplified. But consumer advocates

tend to regard them as a means of fulfilling the letter of plain language laws while evading their spirit."[8]

Mr. Alan Siegel, president of Siegel and Gale, a New York communications firm, responded to the question of merit in readability testing in The National Underwriter.[9] Mr. Siegel said he also opposes legislative proposals that require legal documents to be subject to specific readability tests and would like to see the states leave it up to private business.

Even Flesch, in his book How to Test Readability[10] wrote that it is of extreme importance to remember that testing readability is not an end in itself, but a tool by which to achieve other things. Its purpose is to determine a given reading level, and its goal is to help raise readability.

Plain English Legislation--Pros and Cons

Along with readability tests, the laws themselves have been subject to a great deal of controversy because of their alleged vagueness, the influential interests that often oppose them, and the effect they may have on the body of contract law.

To quote a recent subcommittee report published in The Business Lawyer, "while most concerned parties approve the concept of Plain Language in principle, there is little argument either as to whether it should be statutorily mandated or as to the scope or contents of such statutes."[11]

The National Conference of State Legislatures Information Service in its report entitled "Legislation Requiring

Plain Language"[12] cites that opponents of plain language laws argue:

. because current contracts and policies have developed through thousands of court cases, introduction of an entirely new language structure will require much of that litigation to begin again, as new, precise meanings are given;

. no one knows what "plain" language means--what is plain to one person may be vague or misleading to another;

. enforcement costs, to all parties involved, will be high; and

. varying state requirements could possibly create state, federal, or interstate conflicts, severely hampering the ability of one firm to do business in different states.

Positive Results

But as simplified documents spread across the country they are proving to be helpful public relations and marketing tools. Roland Laferriere, senior vice president of The Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, stated in The New York Times, "simplified forms are nothing more than a necessity in today's marketplace." When asked why his company responded so quickly to the call for simplified forms, he answered, "The consumer movement was demanding it...It was in our best interest to do something pretty damn quick. Our new, simplified policy adds flexibility, means less paper, handling, and storage. Freed from having to explain complex policies to clients, our agents are easier to train, and have

more selling time. The new readable policy means a change. But change is a critical part of our future growth as an industry."[13]

Linda Kocolowski reported in The National Underwriter[14] that a Siegel and Gale survey of 101 commercial bank loan customers indicated that 79% expressed positive attitudes toward borrowing from a bank using a simplified loan agreement. After reading an old agreement and a new simplified version, those surveyed said they greatly preferred the new form because it was easy to read, easy to understand, specific and precise, and provided a good breakdown of the information. They also indicated that a bank using the simplified agreement "would be trustworthy, sensitive to the customer, modern, and efficient."[15]

Losing Legal Precision--Another Pandora's Box?

And in response to the concern that plain language laws will open a Pandora's box of legal loopholes: Victor Fanikos, attorney for the Massachusetts State Insurance Division, reports that in the four years his state has used simplified insurance policies, no policy interpretation case has come to court. Prior to the simplified policies, at least one such case was judged every year by the State Supreme Court.

David Mellinkoff, professor of law at the University of California, further challenges traditional arguments justifying boilerplate legal language. In his book, The Language of the Law, he states, "As a thesaurus of circumstance, case law only rarely makes the pretension of being

a dictionary of precise definition. Like soldiers who have been in the army but not in combat, most of the words in the cases have been in litigation but not litigated. And even when the words themselves are litigated, they have seldom come to rest for more than a moment. With each change of circumstance, they are prodded, stretched, squeezed and reshaped."[16]

Although the doctrine of caveat emptor (buyer beware) has been the traditional law of the marketplace, more and more, the courts are striking down boilerplate clauses and impenetrable language "hanging their opinions on such legal pegs as absence of consent, fraud, unconscionability, or some similar doctrine."[17]

It gets down to questioning the most basic principle of contract law which holds that a contract involves "mutuality of assent." Given this, can one seriously suggest that mutuality exists in a document that cannot be understood by one of the contracting parties? In their book Simplified Consumer Credit Forms,[18] Carl Felsenfeld and Alan Siegel ask: if there is no assent, is there really a contract?

The State of the Art

The concepts are challenging. As the movement continues to grow, and more simplified legal forms are put to test, the questions cited here, and many more will be answered.

But, with all this theoretical debate going on, what are our professional communicators and public relations specialists

doing? What do they think about the issue? Are they knowledgeable enough to take a stand? Are they cleaning up their own act first--formally evaluating and improving their organizations' written materials? Or are they dragging their feet, and waiting until they are legally forced?

By asking these questions and more, this research will attempt to find out where those charged with the task of effective communication are leading us.

FOOTNOTES

[1]George Miller, Professor Psychology, Princeton Univ., Princeton, N.J. Summary remarks at the Conference on the Relationship Between Speech and Learning to Read.

[2]Ibid.

[3]J. S. Chall, "Reading and Development," Keynote address at the International Reading Association's 20th Annual Convention, N.Y., N.Y., 1975.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Janice C. Redish, speech given at the Practising Law Institute's Drafting Documents in Plain Language workshop, N.Y., N.Y., March 1979.

[8]"A Rash of Plain Language Bills," The New York Times, April 17, 1979.

[9]Linda M. Kocolowski, "Tell How to Simplify A Policy," The National Underwriter, (quote by Alan Siegel) Oct. 15, 1976, p. 72.

[10]Rudolf Flesch, How to Test Readability, Harper Publishing, N.Y., N.Y., 1951.

[11]A Report by the Subcommittee on the Regulation of Consumer Credit of the Corporate, Banking and Business Law Section of the American Bar Assoc., The Business Lawyer; Vol. 35, Nov. 1979, p. 297.

[12]"Legislation Requiring Plain Language," published by The National Conference of State Legislatures Information Service, Denver, Col.

[13]Alan Siegel, "Plain English Results," New York Times, April 1, 1979.

[14]Linda Kocolowski, "Tell How to Simplify a Policy."

[15]Ibid.

[16]David Mellinkoff, The Language of the Law, Little Brown & Co., Boston, Mass. 1963, p. 296.

[17]Carl Felsenfeld, Alan Siegel, Simplified Consumer Credit Forms, Warren, Gorham & Lamont, Boston, Mass., 1978, p. VII.

[18]Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

THE TREATMENT OF THE DATA

The Data

Two types of data were considered in this research project: primary and secondary.

The primary data were obtained through a question and answer telephone survey administered to 219 professional communicators around the country.

The secondary data were obtained from published and unpublished texts, studies, and articles about readability and simplified writing.

The Criteria for the Admissibility of the Data

Much care was taken to insure consistent survey delivery, and accurate answer recording. To prevent the injection of bias, a standard introduction and questioning pattern were developed.

Description of the Subjects

The survey sample was 219 professional communication directors randomly selected from private businesses, public institutions, and government agencies. These organizations varied in their size, geographic location, communication needs, and productive purpose.

The following lists the number of communicators surveyed from each industry category:

Industry Category	Number Surveyed	Industry Category	Number Surveyed
Aerospace	1	Law Firms	17
Appliances	2	Leisure Time Industry	3
Associations	20	Machinery	6
Automotive	3	Manufacturing	16
Banking	11	Metals & Mining	4
Beverages	1	Natural Resources	6
Building Materials	2	Office Equip., Computers	4
Chemicals	4	Oil Serv. & Supply, Gas	3
Conglomerates	1	Paper	2
Containers	1	Personal Care Products	2
Co-operatives	1	Publishing	4
Drugs	4	Radio & TV	2
Electrical	4	Real Estate Inv. Trusts	6
Finance	7	Real Estate & Housing	7
Food Processing	4	Retail	6
Government, Federal	4	Service Industry	5
Government, State	2	Steel	4
Government, Local	3	Textiles & Apparel	2
Hospitals	9	Tire & Rubber	2
Instruments	3	Transportation	4
Insurance	10	Utilities	8

How the Subjects were Chosen

The communicators from government organizations were identified through telephone directories and government information offices.

Those from private businesses and trade associations were selected from O'Dwyer's 1978 Directory of Corporate Communicators. An excellent source, this directory is a result of an extensive survey taken in the spring of 1978 by the J.R. O'Dwyer Co., a N.Y. publisher. Its purpose is to define how American companies and organizations staff their public relations/communications operations. The Directory lists 2,400 companies and 300 associations, of which approximately 80% have public relations representatives or established communications departments. According to O'Dwyer's, the trend has been away from the use of the term "public relations" and towards "corporate communications" or just plain "communications." Other possible titles are "public affairs," "corporate relations," "public information," and "advertising/public relations."

Description of Measures Employed

The research was conducted by means of a simple question and answer telephone survey. To ensure that the questionnaire was readable, comprehensible, and arranged in a logical order, it was reviewed by: a communications specialist, a computer analyst, a teacher, and a clerical assistant. I chose these four people because of their diverse occupations and educational backgrounds.

Conducting the Survey

The calls were made during normal working hours over a six-month period. To prevent confusion, the following introduction was developed and used to open the discussion.

Personal Introduction:

Hello M_____:

My name is Jodee Sacco and I am a graduate student at The American University in Washington, D.C.

Purpose of Call:

In light of our country's high rate of functional illiteracy, "plain English" laws, and the Presidential Executive Order encouraging the use of understandable English in the federal government, I have chosen the language simplification movement for my research topic.

To gather research data and evaluate the effect of this movement, I am surveying over 200 communication directors. If you have time, I would like to ask you a few questions. It should only take about five minutes.

Is now convenient for you?

(If the respondent answered "yes," I began the survey. If the respondent answered "no," I rescheduled the call.)

Survey Design

The survey was composed of 16 main questions, and 2 sub-questions. There was 1 "fill-in the blank" question, 1 "open ended" question, 6 "multiple choice" questions, and 10 "yes" or "no" questions.

The first five questions were designed to measure the respondents' personal knowledge of and attitude toward the plain English movement. The rest of the questions were designed to evaluate the organizations' responses to it.

The Survey:

Please answer the following five questions based on your personal experience:

1. What percentage of the American adult population do you believe to be "functionally illiterate?"

   10% 15% 20% 25% 30%

2. On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how important you believe the issue of language simplification to be. (1 = totally unimportant, 5 = important)

   1 2 3 4 5

3. Have you read any books or articles or attended any meetings or conferences on this subject?

   yes no

4. Are you familiar with the use of readability tests?

   yes no

5. Do you keep a file on this subject?

   yes no

Please answer the remaining questions as a representative of your organization:

6. On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you rate your organization's communication efforts? (1 = totally effective, 5 = very effective)

   1 2 3 4 5

7. Do any of the plain English laws affect your organization?

yes no don't know

8. Does your organization have an established policy regarding the clarity of its written materials?

yes no

9. The following question refers to all groups your organization communicates with, such as clients, consumers, employees, etc.

The question is: Has your organization recently made any formal attempt to assess the reading and comprehension level of its various audiences?

yes no

10. The following question refers to publications used by your organization such as benefit booklets, training manuals, contracts, warranties, etc.

The question is: Has your organization recently made any attempt to formally assess the readability of its various written materials?

yes no

11. If you were to simplify the language in any of your organization's written materials, which would you attend to first?

_____

_____

12. Have any of your employees recently attended "writing improvement" or "effective writing" seminars?

yes no

A. If yes:

Was the seminar effective and worthwhile?

yes no

B. If no:

Do you feel such a seminar would be helpful?

yes no

13. Has your organization recently engaged anyone to simplify any of its communication materials?

yes no

14. Has your organization recently spent any money on language simplification--be it for seminars or the actual rewriting of materials?

yes no

A. Could you share with me in round numbers the amount of money you've committed to this effort?

a. $0 - 1,000 d. 10 - 15,000 g. over 25,000

b. 1 - 5,000 e. 15 - 20,000

c. 5 - 10,000 f. 20 - 25,000

15. If the money were available, approximately how much would you budget for this kind of project?

a. $0 - 1,000 d. 10 - 15,000 g. over 25,000

b. 1 - 5,000 e. 15 - 20,000

c. 5 - 10,000 f. 20 - 25,000

16. Do you have any additional comments you would like to make regarding this issue?

_____

_____

_____

Research Design and Procedure

The following is a description of how the survey questions were designed and used to evaluate the subproblems and hypotheses:

Specific Treatment of the Data for each Subproblem

Subproblem One

To measure the awareness professional communicators have about our country's high rate of functional illiteracy.

The Data Needed

The data needed for solving subproblem one are:

. the percentage of communicators "aware" and "unaware" of our high functional illiteracy rate.

The Location of the Data

This data will be determined from the answers to survey question one. Since the American adult functional illiteracy rate falls between 20 and 25% those that answered "don't know, 10, or 15%" will be considered "unaware." Those that answered "20, 25, or 30%" will be considered "aware."

Subproblem Two

To determine if communicators are aware of the important role effective writing can play in helping the functionally illiterate.

The Data Needed

The data needed for solving subproblem two are:

. the percentage of communicators who believe the issue of language simplification to be important within the group "aware" and the group "unaware" of the functional illiteracy problem.

The Location of the Data

This data will be determined from the answers to survey questions one and two.

Subproblem Three

To see if communicators have developed activities encouraging clear, readable writing within their organizations, and if so, how successful they believe these activities to be.

The Data Needed

The level of activity will be determined by the presence of the following:

- policy regarding clarity of written materials;
- formal assessment of the reading and comprehension level of various audiences;
- formal assessment of the readability of various written materials;
- employee attendance to writing improvement seminars;
- engagement of outside writing specialists; and
- expenditure of funds for language simplification.

The communicators' opinions about the success of these activities will be rated.

The Location of the Data

Language simplification activity will be measured by the number of "yes" answers to questions 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, and 14.

Question 6 will determine how communicators rate the success of their organizations' activities on a 1 - 5 scale.

Subproblem Four

To measure the effect plain English laws have had on communicators and their organizations.

The Data Needed

The organizations surveyed must be categorized into those that are affected by plain English legislation and those that are not.

Within these two categories the following must be determined:

. the level of language simplification activity within the organizations; and

. the level of knowledge communicators have about the language simplification issue:

  . read books, articles, or attended meetings;

  . familiar with use of readability tests;

  . keep file on the subject;

  . awareness of functional illiteracy problem.

The Location of the Data

Question 7 will determine whether or not the organizations are affected by plain English laws.

As mentioned earlier, the level of activity within the organizations will be determined by the number of "yes" answers to questions 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, and 14.

The communicators' level of knowledge will be measured by the number of "yes" answers to questions 3, 4, and 5 and the number of "20, 25, or 30%" answers to question 1.

Specific Treatment of the Data for each Hypothesis

Hypothesis One

Communicators aware of our functional illiteracy problem realize the importance of language simplification more than

communicators unaware of the problem.

How the Data will be Analyzed

The survey sample will be divided into two groups: Those "aware" and those "unaware" of the functional illiteracy problem.

The importance each group gives the issue of language simplification will be measured and compared in two ways:

. First, the mean answer to question 2 will be compared for the two groups, and evaluated for statistical significance with a t test.

. Second, the percentage of respondents in each group, rating the importance of language simplification as "4 or 5" in question 2, will be compared. The difference in these percentages, if any, will also be tested for statistical significance.

Hypothesis Two

Organizations directly affected by readability laws, and therefore consumer oriented, have done the most to simplify their information.

How the Data will be Analyzed

Question 7 divides the communicators into three groups:

. those from organizations "affected" by plain English laws;

. those from organizations "not affected" by plain English laws; and

. those that "do not know" if their organization is affected by plain English laws.

For each of these groups the level of "plain language activity" will be measured in the following way:

Questions 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, and 14 each ask about the presence of some activity within the organization. Each organization will be given an activity level score of 0 to 6 based on the number of "yes" answers to questions 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, and 14.

The mean score for each group will be calculated. The difference, if any, between the scores of the group affected by plain English laws and the group not affected will be tested for significance.

Hypothesis Three

Communicators from organizations that have to comply with readability laws will know more about the language simplification issue than communicators from organizations that do not.

For each of the three groups identified in hypothesis two, knowledge about the language simplification issue will be measured in the following way:

Each communicator will be given a score of 0 to 4 for his or her level of knowledge. Each "yes" answer to questions 3, 4, or 5 will indicate an increase in that knowledge and will therefore score one point. An answer of "20, 25, or 30%" to question 1 also indicates knowledge and will score one point. A mean score will be calculated for each of the three groups. Any difference will be tested for statistical significance.

Hypothesis Four

More organizations do not have an established policy regarding the readability of their written materials than do.

How the Data will be Analyzed

Question 8 determines the existence of an established policy.

The hypothesis will be proven true if the percentage of "no" answers is significantly greater than the percentage of "yes" answers.

Hypothesis Five

More organizations have not committed funds to simplify their written materials than have.

How the Data will be Analyzed

Question 14 determines if funds have been committed.

The hypothesis will be proven true if the percentage of "no" answers is significantly greater than the percentage of "yes" answers.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Sample Size

As stated in chapter three, 219 communicators were asked to participate in the survey. It should be noted, however, that out of 219, nine refused to participate. They were deleted from the survey, leaving a statistical sample of 210.

Specific Findings

N/A = no answer given

S = standard deviation

The formulas used to test the statistical validity of the results are located in Appendix B.

Question One: What percentage of the American adult population do you believe to be "functionally illiterate?"

Answer	Responses	% of Total
N/A	25	11.9
10%	20	9.5
15%	41	19.5
20%	45	21.4
25%	39	18.6
30%	40	19.1

Question Two: On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how important you believe the issue of language simplification to be. (1 = totally unimportant, 5 = important)

Answer	Responses	% of Total
N/A	1	0.5
1	2	1.0
2	6	2.9
3	47	22.4
4	69	32.8
5	85	40.4

Question Three: Have you read any books or articles or attended any meetings or conferences on this subject?

Answer	Responses	% of Total
yes	182	86.7
no	27	12.8
N/A	1	0.5

Question Four: Are you familiar with the use of readability tests?

Answer	Responses	% of Total
yes	100	47.6
no	109	51.9
N/A	1	0.5

Question Five: Do you keep a file on this subject?

Answer	Responses	% of Total
yes	61	29.0
no	149	71.0
N/A	0	0.0

Often the file was an informal collection of information compiled by the communicators, rather than an "official" organizational file.

Question Six: On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you rate your organization's communication efforts? (1 = totally ineffective, 5 = very effective)

Answer	Responses	% of Total
N/A	1	0.5
1	2	1.0
2	11	5.2
3	73	34.8
4	88	41.9
5	35	16.6

Question Seven: Do any of the plain English laws affect your organization?

Answer	Responses	% of Total
yes	56	26.7
no	54	25.7
don't know	100	47.6

Question Eight: Does your organization have an established policy regarding the clarity of its written materials?

Answer	Responses	% of Total
yes	28	13.3
no	182	86.7
N/A	0	0.0

Of those answering "yes," many qualified their answer by stating that it was an "informally" recognized or encouraged policy rather than an "officially" written policy.

Question Nine: Has your organization recently made any formal attempt to assess the reading and comprehension level of its various audiences?

Answer	Responses	% of Total
yes	32	15.2
no	178	84.8
N/A	0	0.0

It's interesting to note that although 84.8% said that no "formal" assessment had been taken, many said that "informal" assessments had been taken. If their organizations were large and divisionalized, they further qualified their answer by saying "no, but I'm really not sure."

Of the 15.2% that said "yes," formal assessments had been taken, most said they were taken primarily to improve advertising efforts.

Question Ten: Has your organization recently made any attempt to formally assess the readability of its various written materials?

Answer	Responses	% of Total
yes	74	35.2
no	132	62.9
N/A	4	1.9

As in question nine, although nearly twice as many answered "no" than "yes," those answering "no" often qualified their answer by stating that "informal" assessments had been taken.

Question Eleven: If you were to simplify the language in any of your organization's written materials, which would you attend to first?

Of the 94 answers given, a wide variety of written materials was identified. Those most frequently identified were:

- Legal Information;
- Employee Communication Materials;
- Financial Information;
- Policies and Procedures;
- Government Regulations; and
- Customer Service Information.

A summary of the answers is located in Appendix A.

It is interesting to note that out of 210 communicators, 116 gave no answer to this question. Many thought it difficult to identify one item as the "most needy," with so many things in need. Others were hesitant to commit themselves, avoiding possible criticism of their organizations.

Question Twelve: Have any of your employees recently attended "writing improvement" or "effective writing" seminars?

Answer	Responses	% of Total
yes	78	37.1
no	123	58.6
N/A	9	4.3

Many of the communicators that said "no" to this question qualified their answer by stating that they weren't sure due to the size of their organization.

Question Twelve, A: Was the seminar effective and worthwhile?

Of the 78 that answered "yes" to question 12:

Answer	Responses	% of Total
yes	71	91.0
no	0	0.0
N/A	7	9.0

Although 91% thought the seminar was worthwhile, many added that more follow-up was needed.

Question Twelve, B: Do you feel such a seminar would be helpful?

Of the 123 that answered "no" to question 12:

Answer	Responses	% of Total
yes	73	59.3
no	19	15.5
N/A	31	25.2

The 31 listed as "not answering" said "possibly" a seminar would be helpful, but they would not commit to a "yes" or "no."

Question Thirteen: Has your organization recently engaged anyone to simplify any of its communication materials?

Answer	Responses	% of Total
yes	32	15.2
no	168	80.0
N/A	10	4.8

Of the 15.2% that answered "yes," employee benefit communications specialist were the most frequently hired.

Of the 80% that answered "no," many qualified their answer by stating that although simplification specialists had not been hired, public relations, advertising, and market research specialists had been.

Question Fourteen: Has your organization recently spent any money on language simplification--be it for seminars or the actual rewriting of materials?

Answer	Responses	% of Total
yes	75	35.7
no	122	58.1
N/A	13	6.2

Of the 35.7% that answered "yes," more money was spent on employee training than on hiring outside consultants to simplify written materials.

Question Fourteen, A: Could you share with me in round numbers the amount of money you've committed to this effort?

Of the 75 that answered "yes" to question 14:

Answer	Responses	% of 75 "yes's"
N/A	64	85.3
$ 0 - 1,000	4	5.4
1 - 5,000	0	0.0
5 - 10,000	1	1.3
10 - 15,000	0	0.0
15 - 20,000	0	0.0
20 - 25,000	0	0.0
over 25,000	6	8.0

It is important to note that when asked to commit to a dollar amount, 85.3% would not.

Question Fifteen: If the money were available, approximately how much would you budget for this kind of project?

Answer	Responses	% of Total
N/A	195	92.8
$ 0 - 1,000	1	0.5
1 - 5,000	3	1.4
5 - 10,000	3	1.4
10 - 15,000	0	0.0
15 - 20,000	1	0.5
20 - 25,000	2	1.0
over 25,000	5	2.4

It is important to note that when again asked to commit to a dollar amount, 92.8% would not.

Question Sixteen: Do you have any additional comments you would like to make regarding this issue?

97 communicators, or 46.2% of the total 210, had additional comments. Their comments were general in nature and did not appear to show any significant pattern.

Answering the Subproblems

Subproblem One

To measure the awareness professional communicators have about our country's high rate of functional illiteracy.

Of the 210 communicators surveyed, those that answered "don't know, 10 or 15%" are considered "unaware." Those that answered "20, 25, or 30%" are considered "aware."

Findings

unaware 40.9% aware 59.1%

Subproblem Two

To determine if communicators are aware of the important role effective writing can play in helping the functionally illiterate.

Of those surveyed, 73.2% rated the issue of language simplification 4 or 5 on a 1 - 5 scale. The mean of the ratings was 4.08 with a standard deviation of 0.95. While this implies that communicators in general believe language simplification to be important, a more significant finding is that a correlation was found between the communicators' awareness of the functional illiteracy problem and how important they believe language simplification to be.

Of the 86 categorized as "unaware" of the functional

illiteracy problem, 62.8% rated the issue of language simplification 4 or 5. The mean rating for this group was 3.76 with a standard deviation of 0.98.

Of the 124 categorized as "aware," 80.6% rated the issue 4 or 5. The mean rating for the "aware" group was 4.30 with a standard deviation of 0.86.

Subproblem Three

To see if communicators have developed activities encouraging clear, readable writing within their organizations, and if so, how successful they believe these activities to be.

Each communicator was given an activity score of 0 - 6 based on the number of "yes" answers to questions 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, and 14.

Score (# of "yes" answers)	% of Total
0	40.5
1	14.8
2	20.0
3	11.4
4	5.2
5	6.7
6	1.4

This shows that of the communicators surveyed, two out of five had done none of the activities specified on p. 31 of this study, and 3 out of 4 had done two or less. The mean activity score was 1.5 with a standard deviation of 1.64.

When asked how they rated their organization's communication efforts on a 1 - 5 scale, the mean response was 3.7 with a standard deviation of .88.

Answer	Responses	% of Total	Mean # of "yes" answers to 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14
N/A	1	0.5	0.0
1	2	1.0	0.5
2	11	5.2	1.4
3	73	34.8	0.9
4	88	41.9	1.7
5	34	16.6	2.7

The findings indicate that communicators rating their organization's efforts "very effective" were more readability active--the mean "activity score" being 2.7. Those that rated their organization's efforts slightly to moderately effective had a mean activity score of .9, signifying that of the six possible readability activities, their organizations had only done one.

Subproblem Four

To measure the effect plain English laws have had on communicators and their organizations.

Of the 210 communicators surveyed, 100 did not know if their organizations were affected by plain English laws. 54, or about half of the remaining 110 said that the laws did not apply, and 56 said that they did.

The organizations' readability activity and the communicators' knowledge of the issue were evaluated for each group.

	Responses	Mean Activity Score	Mean Knowledge Score
Total	210	1.5	2.2
Affected by Law	56	2.2	2.8
Not Affected	54	1.2	2.2
Don't Know	100	1.3	1.8

The finding indicates that the 56 organizations affected by the laws were the most readability active, and had the most knowlegeable communicators.

Testing the Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

Communicators aware of our functional illiteracy problem realize the importance of language simplification more than communicators unaware of the problem.

First, the mean rating of importance given language simplification on a 1 - 5 scale was compared for each group:

Unaware	3.76	S = 0.98
Aware	4.30	S = 0.86

Second, the percentage of respondents rating the importance 4 or 5 was compared.

Unaware	62.8%
Aware	80.6

The differences between the two groups was found to be statistically significant at the 0.05 level of confidence by use of a t test. The hypothesis, therefore, is correct.

Hypothesis Two

Organizations directly affected by readability laws, and therefore consumer oriented, have done the most to simplify their information.

As already shown in answering Subproblem Four, organizations directly affected by readability laws performed approximately twice as many activities as those not affected. This was proven by a t test at the 0.05 level of confidence. Thus, the hypothesis is correct.

Hypothesis Three

Communicators from organizations that have to comply

with readability laws will know more about the language simplification issue than communicators from organizations that do not.

As already shown in answering Subproblem Four, communicators from organizations affected by readability laws are somewhat more knowledgeable about the issue than communicators from organizations not affected. This was proven by a t test at the 0.05 level of confidence. Thus, the hypothesis is correct.

Hypothesis Four

More organizations do not have an established policy regarding the readability of their written materials than do.

Of the total 210 surveyed:

	Responses	% of Total
established policy	28	13.3
no established policy	182	86.7

The percentage of organizations that do not have an established readability policy is significantly greater than the percentage of those that do at a 0.05 level of confidence. Thus, the hypothesis is correct.

Hypothesis Five

More organizations have not committed funds to simplify their written materials than have.

Of total 210 surveyed:

	Responses	% of Total
funds	75	35.7
no funds	122	58.1
N/A	13	6.2

The percentage of organizations that have not committed funds is significantly greater than the percentage that have, at a 0.05 level of confidence. Thus, the hypothesis is correct.

Other Findings

The most difficult to survey were, undoubtedly, communicators from government agencies. Having grown as vast as it has, the bureaucratic system tossed me from one office to the next, few employees knowing what I meant by "language simplification," and "readability," and as it appeared, few caring.

After much frustration and many hours of phone calls, I was directed to what appeared to be the light at the end of the tunnel--The White House, Office of Management and Budget. There I found an extremely knowledgeable and helpful woman, Diane Steed, acting deputy director, Regulatory Policy.

According to Ms. Steed, her office is responsible for the enforcement of Presidential Executive Order 12044, requiring federal agencies to simplify regulations.

Ms. Steed further informed me that although 12044 expired on June 30 of this year, the Order has been extended under a new Order, 12221, through April 30, 1981.

12044 was primarily written to provide a framework federal agency management could use to review regulatory practices. It requires:

. Semi-annual agendas in government agencies--according to Steed, the employees find these very helpful.

. Regulatory Analysis--asks agencies to first approach the problem logically, then write the regulation.

. Review of Existing Regulations--agencies ask the public what regulations need improving, then they change the rule making accordingly.

. Regulatory Contact Person--an individual from each agency responsible for implementing 12221. They usually are located in the agency's Office of the General Counsel, Office of Planning and Management, or Office of the Secretary.

. Plain English Compliance--regulations are to be written in plain understandable English.

Ms. Steed believes the very difficult task of simplifying bureaucratise is being accomplished, although slowly. She cited public comments that Equal Employment Opportunity materials, and the Department of Energy regulatory preambles were easier to read. She also thought policy-makers and their clerical assistants were paying more attention to language than they've ever done before.

To encourage a continued interest in simplified writing, Steed's office, along with the Office of Personnel Management, recently held an all-day clinic training agency trainers to teach their people clear, effective writing. These skills are also becoming part of the government's personnel evaluation system. Effective writing is now being taken into account in an employee's annual performance rate.

And finally, 12221 has brought about the establishment of the Presidential Awards Program. To be announced this fall,

this program will ask the public to nominate readable regulations. Steed hopes the publicity will create competition between the agencies, furthering their simplification efforts.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Review of the Findings

How far the language simplification movement will go is hard to say. Although this research found that 23% of communicators surveyed rated the plain language concept "important," and 73% rated it "very important," they are only a small segment of the population--and possibly a biased segment at that. Communicators, after all, by the very nature of their profession are likely supporters of such a movement.

Yet, even with this support, little is actually being done to simplify. Out of the six possible readability activities offered in this survey, the average communicator has done only 1.5. Looking at the overall percentages, 75% have done two or less, and 40% have done none.

However, a correlation was found between how effective communicators believe their organizations' communication programs to be, and how much effort was spent trying to simplify their written materials. Those that rated their organizations' programs "very effective" averaged three readability activities. Those that rated their organizations' programs "ineffective" averaged only one readability activity.

One of the most obvious shortcomings is the lack of knowledge communicators have about language simplification and its related issues, such as functional illiteracy. Only 59% of those surveyed realize the severity of our national

reading problem and the negative effect it has on individuals and our society. Only 48% know what a readability test is. Only 29% keep a file on the subject, and 48% do not know if their organization is affected by readability laws. Only 15% have formally evaluated their audiences' reading levels, and only 35% have formally evaluated the readability of their organizations' written materials.

One interesting, though disappointing, finding was that only a few had committed money to language simplification, or would project how much their organizations should spend in the future. Unfortunately, communicators have very little say about financial expenditures or budgeting. Another disappointing finding was that, in many of the organizations surveyed, the communication departments were not responsible for those materials identified as needing the most attention. Apparently, legal information usually is written by lawyers; employee benefit booklets by insurance or personnel specialists; financial reports by financial officers; policies and procedures by managers; government regulations by bureaucrats; and customer service information by technical and marketing representatives.

Recommendations

Given these findings, if language simplification is ever to succeed, I recommend that our communication leaders:

. learn more about language simplification, its related issues, and the laws that support it;

. become more assertive, broaden their responsibilities,

and play a more important role in their organizations' decision making process;

. commit themselves, both intellectually and financially, to the concept of simplification; and

. take action--establishing policies requiring clear, readable writing, and evaluation methods to improve written materials.

This paper is not suggesting that language simplification will solve all our country's problems. There are no golden answers. But I am suggesting that it will help some of our problems such as functional illiteracy, psychological alienation, and the mental frustration caused by confusing documents.

Intellectuals argue that by lowering the written form to meet the needs of the masses, we are admitting defeat. Instead, they say, we should keep trying to boost intelligence, comprehension, and vocabulary levels.

Admirable as this may seem, it is highly unrealistic when one realizes that in 1975 costs for a national reading improvement program were estimated to be in the billions of dollars.

The legal profession argues that if you simplify the language in certain contracts, you will create legal loopholes making it impossible to argue a case. One cannot help but question the motives behind this argument and wonder if this approach favors economic preservation over word preservation.

Tests have proven that the same characteristics predicting comprehension also predict learning rates. Thus, within fairly broad limits, we can achieve the same effects by trading off reading instruction against editorial adjustment in written materials.[1]

Future Implications

Flesch dreamt that his Plain and Easy English System would be used as an international language, uniting people across the globe. As he explained it, democracy could be defined as government by plain talk.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, understanding the power of simple prose, changed a speech that read, "We are trying to construct a more inclusive society," to "We are going to make a country in which no one is left out."

Albert Joseph, president of the Industrial Writing School in Cleveland, Ohio, believes the move toward plain English and a more informed public may be the beginning of a new "linguistic honesty." Such honesty, he states, is the backbone of a free nation.

Dr. Mark Kimble, assistant vice president of Benefacts Inc. a language simplification consulting firm in Baltimore, Maryland, believes that because a person's language is a very important part of his or her conduct, language simplification is also a moral issue.

To quote Dr. Kimble, "If we don't wake up to the mind-boggling importance of clear communications, then we will not have lived up to responsibilities that, in my mind, are

as largely moral as they are professional--because we're dealing with human beings and with the problems that human beings inevitably have understanding one another."[2]

Divided as we all are on this issue, there is a long-run trend toward a more informed populace via simple words. This trend toward simple, efficient communication can be seen in our fast moving world full of summaries, Reader's Digests, newscaps, and Today shows. It can also be seen in our modern language of statistics and our growing use of computers. Traditional avenues of communication can no longer keep pace.

Although promising, language simplification, like Truth-in-Lending, is going to be a long process of trial and error. If handled properly, it can help bring about increased literacy, better use of resources, and greater understanding of the democratic process.

Time and use will be the test. For now, as Flesch put it, "Whether you consider the plain language movement an impoverishment or an enrichment depends on your point of view."[3]

FOOTNOTES

[1] J. T. Gunthrie, "Learnability Vs. Readability of Texts," Journal of Educational Research, Feb. 1972.

[2] Dr. Mark Kimble, Ph.D, Benefacts Inc., Speech made before the California Savings and Loan Association, Los Angeles, California, April 24, 1979.

[3] Rudolf Flesch, How to Test Readability, N.Y., N.Y., 1951, p. 50.

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APPENDIX A

Answers to Question Eleven

Written materials communicators identified as those that should be simplified first in their organizations:

Written Materials	# of times answered
N/A	116
Advertising Information	2
Application Forms (Consumer Credit)	1
Association Member Applications	1
Customer Service Information	5
Employee Communications	
. Benefits Information	11
. General Publications	2
. Training Information	2
Financial Information	
. Annual Reports	8
. Prospectuses	4
Freight Bills	1
Government Regulations	5
Hospital Information	
. Patient Billing	1
. Patient Legal Forms	1
. Patient Medical Reports	1
Insurance Policies	3
Legal Information	
. Client Opinion Letters	4
. Consumer Loan Forms	1
. Contracts	8
. General Information	2
. Mortgage Forms	1
. Proxy Statements	1
. Savings Forms	1
. Title Documents	1
Legislative Reports	1
Management Reports	1
Operations Manuals	1
Policies re. Plain Language	1
Policies and Procedures	8
Press Releases	2
Research Reports	2
Sales Proposals	1
Speeches	1
Technical Information	
. General Descriptions	2
. Product Related	3
Utility Rate Information	1
Warranties	3
Wills & Trusts	1

APPENDIX B

Formulas

. Standard deviation of a value x in a population size n.

$$S = \sqrt{\left(\frac{\Sigma x^2}{n}\right) - \left(\frac{\Sigma x}{n}\right)^2}$$

. To test the difference between two population percentages:

$$Z = \frac{P_1 - P_2}{Sd\,\%}$$

where:

P = the sample percentage

$$Sd\,\% = \sqrt{\bar{P}(100 - \bar{P})\left(\frac{n_1 + n_2}{n_1 n_2}\right)}$$

where:

$$\bar{P} \quad \frac{n_1 P_1 + n_2 P_2}{n_1 + n_2}$$

If the population percentages ($\widehat{\pi}$) are equal ($\widehat{\pi}_1 = \widehat{\pi}_2$) then z will have a normal distribution.

. To test the difference between two population means ($\bar{x}$):

$$t = \frac{(\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2)}{Sd}$$

where:

$$Sd = \hat{\sigma}\sqrt{\frac{n_1 + n_2}{n_1 n_2}}$$

where:

$$\hat{\sigma} = \sqrt{\frac{n_1 s_1^2 + n_2 s_2^2}{n_1 + n_2 - 2}}$$

t should have a normal distribution with $(n_1 + n_2 - 2)$ degrees of freedom.

APPENDIX C

Quotations

"Man acts as if he were the shaper and master of language, while it is language which remains mistress of man."

George Steiner, After Bable

"Interpretation is what gives language life beyond the moment and place of immediate utterance or transcript."

George Steiner, After Bable

"Except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be know what is spoken? For ye shall speak into the air."

I Corinthians XIV:9

The written word
should be clean as bone:
Clear as light,
Firm as stone;
Two words are not
As good as one.

Anonymous